THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): The revised estimates for the year 2004-05 provided for 11.64% of net tax revenue of Central Government to be spent on pension commitments. State Governments during this period spent 14.28% of their net tax revenues on pension commitments.

Impact of unleaded petrol on environment

†*286. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the dangerous benzene gas is dissolving in the atmosphere due to unleaded petrol;

(b) if so, the details thereof, and the steps taken to check it;

(c) whether Government are aware that employees of petrol pumps and the people living around are being affected to great extent and there is risk of blood cancer to the persons living in contact with bengene for a long time; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Keeping in view the potential health hazard posed by benzene in the atmosphere, the Bureau of Indian Standards have laid down permissible limits of benzene level in petrol. In the Auto Fuel Policy approved by the Government, there is a road map for the progressive reduction of the maximum permissible benzene in petrol from 5% to 3% to 1% by 2010. At present, the benzene level in certain identified cities, including metros, has been brought down to 1% maximum, and in the rest of the country, it is at 5% maximum.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had undertaken benzene level measurement in ambient air in Delhi during the years 1999-2003. According to this report, the annual mean benzene level in Delhi has been showing gradual decrease since 1999 and by 2003 had been reduced to a level almost similar to that of the United Kingdom's annual running mean standard of 16 micro gram/m^3.

(c) and (d) Government are aware of the adverse health effects of prolonged exposure to high level of benzene. That is why steps are being taken to progressively reduce the permissible limits of benzene in petrol.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.